

**CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM**  
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B806 Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*  
Family: Cardinalae Order: Passeriformes Class: Aves

Written by: T. Kucera

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

The subspecies of northern cardinal native to the southwest, *C. c. superba*, is a rare resident along the lower Colorado River in California (Garrett and Dunn 1981). It was first reported by Monson (1949). According to Small (1994), the entire population may comprise only a few pairs, and these few may be declining. Northern cardinals seen in Los Angeles County and along the extreme south coast are probably escaped caged birds (Small 1994).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: No diet information specific to California. Probably feeds on insects, seeds, and fruit in brushy riparian thickets and desert scrub (Ehrlich et al 1988, Small 1994).

Cover: Dense shrubs in riparian areas and desert scrub provide cover.

Reproduction: No information specific to California. Nests in shrubs and small trees in other areas (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Water: No information.

Pattern: Rare inhabitant of dense, brush riparian areas and desert scrub along the lower Colorado River.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active during the day.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not known. Probably resident year-long.

Home Range: Not known.

Territory: Probably territorial, but not well studied in California yet.

Reproduction: Not well known. In other areas, northern cardinals are monogamous, and lay up to four broods of three to four eggs during spring and early summer in cup nest in a shrub or small tree. The male cares for the first brood while the female incubates the second clutch (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Niche: Inhabitant of dense, desert riparian areas and desert scrub; cowbird host in other areas (Ehrlich et al. 1988). May be preyed upon by usual vertebrate predators, e.g., accipiters and owls.

#### REFERENCES

- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York.
- Garrett, K. and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of Southern California: status and distribution. Los Angeles Audubon Society, Los Angeles.
- Monson, G. 1949. Recent notes from the lower Colorado River Valley of Arizona and California. Condor 51:229-230.
- Small, A. 1994. California birds: their status and distribution. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.